

# CUYAHOGA COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

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## **CCBH School Guidance**

January 22, 2021 Update

Since the start of the pandemic, we have worked closely with school officials to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 for students, faculty and staff. In July 2020, we issued recommendations for reopening the schools and we began participating in regularly scheduled calls with superintendents that were coordinated by the Educational Services Center. As additional illness data was analyzed and best practices were developed, we issued a Stay-At-Home Health Advisory in the hopes of preventing clusters of illness. The advisory was extended twice with the most recent deadline designated as January 31, 2021.

While we are aware of the fact that school administrators have been under a great deal of pressure to return to a five-day in-person learning format, hesitancy still exists related to children and staff returning to school. We understand that in-person interactions with teachers and other students are critical to a student's long-term growth and development. However, it is also imperative that this can occur in a safe manner that does not jeopardize the health and well-being of the students, family members and friends with whom they regularly interact.

We recommend that schools consider moving toward either a five day in-person or hybrid schedule to align with the Governor's goal of March 1, 2021. We understand that schools may move toward this goal at a pace that works for their respective districts, based on their ability to adhere to the mitigation strategies recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Ohio Department of Health. This time frame would allow for several incubation periods of the COVID-19 virus following any New Year's family gatherings, activities or celebrations. School-related extracurricular activities, including sports, may also be conducted as long as guidelines are consistent with all current federal and state COVID-19 transmission prevention orders, protocols and guidelines.

Ohio Governor DeWine has prioritized school staff and faculty as part of the state's second stage of vaccine distribution, Phase 1B. This follows Phase 1A, which includes healthcare workers, those living and working in congregate care settings, emergency medical responders and others involved with direct patient care. The State of Ohio is currently implementing a strategy to distribute vaccine to numerous providers that began on January 19. The vaccination of all school faculty and staff is important to help minimize the potential for virus transmission in the school setting. Adults working in

5550 Venture Drive ♦ Parma, Ohio 44130

Direct: 216-201-2000 ♦ Fax: 216-676-1311 ♦ TTY: 216-676-1313 ♦ [www.ccbh.net](http://www.ccbh.net)

Terrence M. Allan, R.S., M.P.H. Health Commissioner

schools will be eligible for vaccination beginning on February 1, 2021, per the state plan.

As more vaccinations are made available, schools must continue to maintain all safety protocols and guidelines to help minimize the potential for COVID-19 transmission. The remote learning option may be maintained for those schools which feel that a safe return to in-person learning is not feasible at this time. The remote learning option is also important for students and parents that are not comfortable with returning to an in-person format. The vaccines currently available, which are manufactured by Pfizer and Moderna, are only authorized for the vaccination of those either 16 or 18 years of age and older, respectively.

As always, we would like to commend the school administrators, instructors, staff, parents and students that have helped to minimize the potential spread of COVID-19 in the schools as well as the community. We look forward to continuing our close working relationship with the schools as we move into the next phase of our COVID-19 response.

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